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COURSE: Phase I - Orientation

SUBJECT: Production of National Estimates HOURS: 1

METHOD OF PRESENTATION: Lecture INSTRUCTOR: Abbott Smith

OBJECTIVES OF INSTRUCTION:

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION:

[Redacted Box]

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SUBJECTS WITH WHICH COORDINATION IS REQUIRED

REFERENCES:

REMARKS:

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TAB

Production of National Estimates

I am to discuss with you the Office of National Estimates and the process of making estimates in our intelligence work. We are the Office which formulates, which supervises the production of a document known as a National Intelligence Estimate, which is one of the final products of the Central Intelligence Agency. We are not the only office in CIA that makes the estimates, nor is CIA the only intelligence agency that does so. Every agency, all the offices and all the individuals, I think, in intelligence work constantly have to make estimates. It is part of the business of intelligence work, just as it's a part of daily life, and it's all done, as far as I can see, in the same way. If you have a question posed to you, a question to which there is no clear and definite answer based on ascertainable facts, you get all the facts that you can together that are relative to the problem. You have used the best intelligence and judgment and expert advice and opinion, and faith and prayer and everything else you like, and you answer the question. That is estimating, whether it is done in order to make a National Intelligence Estimate in a blue cover, which has or is presumed to have great authority, or whether it is done simply in some problem of ordinary life. The thing about our office, the Office of National Intelligence Estimates, or the Office of National Estimates, is that we make coordinated estimates. We make the National Intelligence Estimates which represent not the opinion of any one office or certainly not the opinion of one individual, but the coordinated judgment of the whole intelligence community. I'll tell you some more about that process of coordinating judgments and opinions a little bit later. It is one of the most difficult parts of the enterprise. But when we finish a national estimate, let me repeat, it represents not merely the opinion of

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CIA, but the coordinated opinion of CIA plus Army intelligence, Air Force, Navy, the Joint Intelligence Group of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the State Department, and occasionally also the FBI, and the Atomic Energy Commission, and anybody who is really involved with the process. By the time they all sit down together and thrash this thing out and arrive at an opinion - if they can arrive at an opinion - we have, as you can see, a most solemn document and it goes to our consumers who are in the first instance the National Security Council and the President; more specially, perhaps, the planning board of the National Security Council. That is the staff that does the work for the NSC. They are our principal customers, but there are others in the government according to demand. Now a word about the types of questions we deal with. The first kind of questions we deal with is concerning the capabilities and the intentions of other powers and especially of hostile powers...the Soviet Union. This kind of intelligence estimate is based largely upon the precedent and form set forth in the military intelligence estimate. We didn't have in CIA any clear-cut intelligence doctrine; and then some of you, many of you probably, are familiar with the form that the military intelligence people use in the estimate of the enemy's situation. It begins with part 1, on strengths and weaknesses of the enemy. What have you got in terms of men and hardware and what is the state of the terrain and the climate - what are the facts bearing on the situation?

The second part of the military intelligence estimate is the capabilities of the enemy. What is it he can do with the strengths which he has? What is it he could do to you if he wanted to? What courses of action lie within his power if he wants to take them up? And the third part, not always included in the military estimate, but usually, is that of any intentions.

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Which among these courses of action do you think he's most likely to undertake against you? Well, this you supply to the commander and the military outfit, and that is that. He makes up his mind what he'll do about it. Now we adopted that, I think, by accident, and partly by design, for an annual estimate dealing with the Soviet bloc and its threat to us or whatever you want to call it. We had in fact three papers a year which follow a fairly standard form. About two weeks ago, National Intelligence Estimate no. 90, NIE #90, on the capabilities of the Soviet bloc through midnight 1955 was finally approved. Last Tuesday, day before yesterday, NIE #95 on the probable courses of action - that is, the intentions of the Soviet bloc, came up to the IAC. We had a long and difficult and solemn debate, and it isn't quite approved yet. I'll tell you some more about that later.

Thirdly, there is a rather voluminous set of appendices to the estimates, appendices entitled "The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Soviet Bloc", giving a long list of their hardware, what they've got, men, material, what their economy is likely to do, or how it is getting along, the resources which they have in political warfare, the size of the Communist party here and there, the size of the propaganda machinery, etc. That was the longest and most painful thing to get done yesterday - all day yesterday. I happened to have been the chairman of what I sincerely hope and pray is the last meeting on this voluminous document -- 100 pages accompanied by tables. And when you consider that our ordinary national intelligence estimate is about 15 or 20 pages, you can see that we are heavily burdened when we have anything as long as 100 pages to coordinate among everybody in Washington who thinks he has an opinion on the subject. That's what we've been doing. That happens to be one of the things we do for the Soviet Union once a year anyway, in addition

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to all the other kinds of estimates we do. We do that once a year, and we are just in the middle of it now; thus it is very much on my mind right now, and I'll probably come back to it for illustration now and then.

Well, that then is the kind of military type of estimate. Of course, we have a good many other kinds of questions that we have to deal with. One of the most common is the simple requirement to estimate what the current situation is and probable developments are going to be in any country.

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it is an analysis of the current situation, and an estimate as well of probable future developments in this country or area. That's a very familiar kind of paper - we have to do it all the time.

There's another kind of question that we frequently get asked - especially by the National Security Council. What would be the reaction abroad to some course of action that we, the United States, might take? Somebody dreams up a policy; he thinks of something that might happen and he sends over to CIA to get a coordinated estimate of what the probable reaction to doing this job would be. We get all kinds of things. What would be the consequences of a blockade in China? How much good or how much harm would it do to Chinese Communists? What kind of a reaction would it provoke [redacted]? We get asked that question periodically, because people are always thinking it would be nice to block-

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ade China. What would be the reaction if we staged an expedition against

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the island of Pinaan? What would be the reaction if we did such and such and such and such? That's quite a familiar type of problem on which we do national estimates. Mind you, we never make up a problem like that. It would be a breach of the most solemn duty laid upon us if we ever thought up a problem for the United States. Intelligence people must have nothing whatsoever to do with policy. They must not recommend anything. Well, if the policymakers themselves send over a list of courses of action or a course of action and ask what would be the probable reaction to it, we estimate that. But I wish to make it quite clear that it is a very strict rule of our office as it is of any intelligence agency, I think, that we do not recommend policy, nor do we sit there thinking up this and that - that would be fun for the United States to do, and then write intelligence estimates on probable consequences. Well, those are rather standard estimates which we are constantly doing - the capabilities and intentions of some power, situations and probable developments in some area, the reactions or probable reactions to some United States' course of action if it were to be undertaken.

We get all kinds of other questions. Of course, we have periodically to estimate what's going to happen in Indo-China, we used to have, and still do, what's going to happen in Korea. We are certainly going to be asked to do once again what we have had to do frequently in the past - estimate what the Soviet Union is probably going to do about the German situation. In view of the recent German elections, for instance, in view of the greatly increased chance of rearmament of Western Germany - what are the Soviets likely to do about this situation? We'd like to wait a little while longer until more things come in. These kinds of questions come up

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all the time. Suppose some morning the President wants to know how Thailand would make out if the Communists started to exert pressure. He would send the requirement to Mr. Dulles, and we would lay out a National Intelligence Estimate.

Now a word or two about the organization and functioning of our office.

The Office of National Estimates (ONE) is not large. We have between  25X1

25X1  counting everybody from the Assistant Director down to

typists. There is first the Board of National Estimates, which consists

25X1 of  men - the Assistant Director and  There are three kinds 25X1

of people on the board - really, we have retired elder statesmen. We have

25X1 a retired lieutenant general, and a retired admiral; we have a retired am-

bassador - he is retired from his retirement with us - and we'll probably

find another ambassador sometime. That is one kind.

Then we have squadrons of visiting professors and lawyers, etc. We have a professor of history; we have a lawyer, we have an economist - all of whom I think came in from outside for a limited term of duty - one year, two years, perhaps, sometimes three years. Then they go back to their universities or to their offices. We think it is quite important to have this change in the Board of National Estimates so that we don't get in too much of a rut. Then there is the third group of ordinary employees of the Central Intelligence Agency, like myself, who have been in it for some time and who will probably continue in it for some time unless fired.

The Board of ten men is the guiding and supervising authority for the preparation of these estimates. The Board is chosen out of people who have, by experience or by learning, or by judgment some capacity for making up their minds on any of these important questions, for talking them over among themselves, for arriving at judgments, for presiding over meetings, for

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dealing with the various problems that arise.

Then there's the staff, the Estimate Staff; these, of course, are the people who really do the work, [ ] professionals divided into four regional groups - Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Near East, and Far East. These are people of extremely high professional accomplishments. They do the work. They're the ones who draft the estimates, they're the ones who collect the necessary estimates, they're the ones who come into the Board of National Estimates and present a draft and defend it and explain it and muster up the facts that are necessary in order that the members of the Board may make up their minds on the subject. They're the ones who see that the dirty work is all done - getting it typed in proper form and fixing up changes of phraseology, in keeping the right text through all the meetings; they're the ones who sit at the right hand of the Board members in meetings, always, and make sure that the Board member does not give away something that he ought not to give away in the course of the argument. I will explain a little more of the detail of how these things are done later. But here I am just describing the make-up of the Office which does in this case consist of about [ ] professionals on the Estimate Staff. They're the very center and core of the work of the Office. However, it is appropriate for me, as a member of the Board, to say that the Board is the very center and core of the intellect, and so on, of the Office.

Some of our staff members are area specialists, but not all of them. Some of them do general work that will take them around a good deal. If a man is a good man on our staff and he's a Far Eastern specialist, or has been a Far Eastern specialist, he may not want to remain a Far Eastern specialist all his life. In his case, if he really turns out to be good, we may rotate him around in the Near East, or Eastern Europe, etc., and gradually he works up from being a specialist in the area to being a man who does the

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more general work, the drafting, the supervising of drafting, etc. There is a very great freedom of movement from job to job among the staff, and two or three or even more members of the staff each year are always away, attending schools, or attending the Naval War College or National War College or on overseas assignments. That is the way the office is made up.

Now this is the way an estimate is produced, a National Intelligence Estimate. First, somebody of course conceives the idea that there ought to be an estimate. The problem is presented to us. Sometimes it is from the President, sometimes from the Planning Board of the National Security Council; occasionally, though not very often, it comes from one of the other intelligence agencies - G-2 or A-2 or somebody who has something troubling them and wants a coordinated opinion. Sometimes the Director of Central Intelligence has something he wants us to do a job on, and sometimes we think it up ourselves. There's only one body that can officially authorize the beginning of a National Intelligence Estimate and that is the Intelligence Advisory Committee - the IAC. I assume that you probably had that explained to you, but this is a committee which consists of the chief of Naval Intelligence, and the chief of the Air Force Intelligence, the chief of G-2, the special assistant to the Secretary of State, for Intelligence, and they sit under the chairmanship of Mr. Dulles, the Director of Central Intelligence. The IAC - the Intelligence Advisory Committee - is the highest intelligence authority that we have in Washington. They are the ones who authorize, formally authorize the beginning of an intelligence estimate. When we get the problem, it's handed over to the staff, and they have first to state this problem in proper terms. That's one of the most necessary, sometimes one of the most difficult parts of our task. You must know as precisely as possible what your estimate is, if you're going to present.

If you're going to answer a question, it is very necessary to know as exactly as possible what that question is. For instance, somebody on the topside wants to know how things are going in Indo-China. Well, you have got to state precisely the problem which is to be estimated about Indo-China. The staff does that. It's quite a job; and if it's not done correctly, you get into all kinds of trouble and you go off on all kinds of tangents before you have finished. The staff also draws up a set of terms of reference for this estimate indicating the large number of subordinate questions which it is necessary to answer before you can answer the main question. Well, they get all this together, and they bring it to the Board and the Board looks it over and debates it and discusses the problem, discusses the terms of reference, usually approves it, and then it is sent out to the agencies - Army, Navy, Air, State, and so on. Pretty soon a meeting is held with the representatives of these agencies. The problem and the terms of reference are talked over, and it is decided who is going to do what work by way of contribution to the final estimate. Then they all go home and they make their contributions.

You understand that our staff, although I do consider that it is a very skillful staff, is not a research outfit and not primarily a staff of experts. They don't know everything. The work of preparing a National Intelligence Estimate is very widely distributed through the intelligence unit. The final estimate depends upon an enormous accumulation of labor, of knowledge and of judgment - all through the intelligence community all over Washington. The first stage in it is at the point when these people go back to their shops and prepare contributions. In due course the contributions come in, sometimes a very high pile of reading material. Then our staff takes the contributions and draws up the final estimate.

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National Intelligence Estimate itself. As I say, most National Intelligence Estimates are not more than 15 to 20 pages long, but we frequently get 200 pages of contributions. The staff uses that, and uses its own wisdom and knowledge, of which it has quite a lot. It goes around, talks to any people who need to be talked to on the subject to supplement the information and the contributions; it checks opinions, etc. And in the course of time, it produces the first draft and submits it to the Board of National Estimates.

We have a meeting with the staff in which we discuss the paper, line by line and paragraph by paragraph, a painful time for the staff member because it is his best work. He thinks it sometimes is dealt with very harshly; his writing is picked to pieces; generally he has a hard time. But in due course, this draft estimate passes the Board and then is in the form sent out again to the agencies. They keep it a week or so and then we have a coordination meeting with representatives of the State, Air Force, Army, and Navy Intelligence. That's what, for instance, I've been doing this morning.

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This is a pretty hard business sometimes. But after more or less trial and tribulation of these meetings, a text is finally agreed upon, and this coordinated draft is sent to the IAC, which meets every Tuesday morning at a quarter to 11. That is a final approving body. We used to think that IAC would not discuss it. They were altogether too great and dignified men to know anything about these questions. But lately they have taken to discussing an estimate somewhat line by line. The IAC is the final ultimate authority. And when they have appssed this thing, it is then sent to the printer, and printed and bound.

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as far as the Intelligence Community is concerned. That's the way a National Intelligence Estimate is produced.

You may think it takes a long time, and it does occasionally. I think the longest time that we ever took was eighteen months, which represents the time when a paper on the probable effects of the severance of East-West trade was first put under way to the time when it was finally passed through the Intelligence Advisory Committee. I thought that the subject was long since so dried up that it would be of no use to anybody, but as a matter of fact, as it turned out, that estimate was quite important in forming certain aspects of public policy. I'm glad it was, because we certainly took a long enough time. I think the record in the other direction was set by an estimate last spring, for which the need was conceded at nine o'clock one morning and a draft was finished by twelve noon, passed by the Board and sent out to the agencies who sent their representatives in at two o'clock. They met all the afternoon and finished the coordination meeting at five o'clock, after which it was re-typed and the next morning was sent up to the IAC, which approved it by about 11 o'clock and by noon it had gone to the printer. We can do them quickly if we have to.

We do three kinds of estimates: estimates of routine priority, on which we take as long as we need, or as long as we think we need, or as long as we have to; estimates of urgent priority, which means that they don't take too long - we do those as rapidly as convenient; and crash estimates, which can be done well just as fast as ONE has to have them. You could, if necessary convene representatives and write an estimate on a table among you, but it wouldn't be a very good one. We think that if you really want a decent estimate on any question of any breadth at all, you ought to give the opportunity about three weeks or a month to work.

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Let me end up with a few examples of the kind of thing that estimating comes to. I'm sure you know or you could invent this kind of thing perfectly well, but it is sometimes interesting to hear a few actual problems. I will give you one or two of different types just to illustrate how some of these things are worked out. One of the first estimates I ever had anything to do with was a request on what was at that time a subject of lively difficulty - what would be the effect on Western Europe if the supply of Iranian oil were cut off? Iranian oil was then flowing, obviously, and there was some thought that it might cease to flow to Western Europe. What would be the effect? For making that estimate, we were able to get together considerable committee of oil men around Washington attached to various departments; we were able to get some advice on oil companies, oil specialists here and there. We had really an impressive array of expert opinion. But it was possible to solve this thing almost by arithmetic. You knew how much oil Europe used; you knew how much oil Iran produced; you knew how much oil was produced elsewhere. If the experts were ready to guess with confidence how much the production of oil elsewhere could be increased, it was really a very easy estimate to write. We were able to estimate that if Iranian oil ceased to flow there would be a little embarrassment for a few months, after which its supply could easily be derived from other oil fields. Well, of course, that's exactly what happened. And we were glad to know it except that there really wasn't much of any embarrassment for two or three months. Things went just as we had said they would. I give you an example of that partly to indicate an estimate which is relatively easy to solve. Now, another kind. I've always used this illustration when I have spoken over here. There is a great deal of interest in Chinese trade, Chinese ocean-born commerce, what would the effect of a blockade be? How are they getting

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along? What is the state of their economy? And one of the most important factors which comes into this all the time is the transportation system in China, i.e., the inland transportation system, especially railroads. We were able to show, for instance, without too much difficulty that if you shut off all the ocean-going commerce into China, it would be possible - perhaps not very convenient or comfortable - but it would be possible for all the goods to be made up from other parts of the Soviet bloc. They wouldn't just have to go without the stuff if we shut off the ocean-going import of it. And we were able to show without too much trouble that it could even be transported over the trans-Siberian railroad because the trans-Siberian railroad has excessive capacity over what it is using. Then we ran up against a snag. Once it got to the borders of China, could the Chinese railroads or could they not distribute the stuff? Did they have the capacity to take an additional amount of freight beyond that they were now carrying equivalent to the amount that was being brought in by sea-going commerce? Well, we thought they could. But eventually almost this whole question boiled down to the question of how many freight cars the Chinese railroads had. Now there's been a figure of the number of freight cars that the Chinese railroads had - at least 40,000. Well, the railroad tracks will carry a lot more than they carry. But we are very infirm in our knowledge about exactly how many railroad cars the Chinese have. We had to base our estimates on that figure of 40,000, which of course was based on certain amount of pretty good evidence but not nearly as much evidence as we would have liked. And so here is the second example - I am giving you as an example of essentially arithmetical estimate like the Iranian oil one - you simply take the freight cars, the amount that each freight car carries and multiply it by the number of miles that it travels and compare it

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with the tonnage and you get something which is at least theoretically satisfactory. But there we were stuck with at least one pretty dubious point. Our evidence of the number of freight cars was not good and still isn't good. One reason I always use this over here is that I understand that one of the operations of intelligence sometimes is a mere operation of counting freight cars, as they go by on trains. And I wish we had more people counting more freight cars in certain parts of the world, going around on trains because it might help us to estimate the actual effect upon Communist China of a blockade.

One other example - I'll tell a story that I told over here last time, I think. It's a good one; it illustrates the kind of problem that we get into. It's about the Russian heavy bomber. You know that some years ago there was seen in the annual Russian air show a heavy bomber flying. And the fact was duly noted with a great deal of interest, and that's about all anybody thought of it for a long time. I guess it's about all anybody ever did see of it. Well, the crux of the matter of the most extreme interest to us in our annual production of National Intelligence Estimates is whether the Russians do or do not have heavy bombers. And if so, how many? It wasn't very long ago that [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] saw six tails of big aircraft, very tall ones, bigger than anything before. And he was a man who knew his business, who was not just an amateur. Well, he was a long way off from these things. He couldn't see them very well. And so the information came back - what did we have on a heavy bomber? Really, when you come down to solid facts we have one heavy bomber seen several years ago and we had these seven aircraft tails that were up higher than any aircraft tails that we thought should be sticking out from a Russian

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planes. What do you make of that? We had to give an estimate, as I have told you, on the capabilities of the Soviet Union. And heaven knows if one of the capabilities we lie awake at night about is the long-range strategic air force capability. And so we had seven aircraft tails sticking up high. That is the kind of problem that sometimes exercises us. And how grateful we should be for more observations of these tails, or pictures of them, for a little more evidence. I think we'll get some more, but it's rather a narrow base, you know, on which to make a confident estimate.

And now my final illustration is going to be of a different nature because I want to point out to you that we have different kinds of problems. I'm sure you would recognize them, problems to which there is no answer at all, some questions you know you have to estimate on simply because you can't find the facts. I'm sure the Russians know whether they've got any heavy bombers or not, at least the high officials of Russia do. We don't. At least I don't think we do. And we have to estimate on these questions, to which somebody knows the answer but we don't find it out. There's another kind of question to which probably nobody knows the answer. I don't suppose the Russians themselves know exactly what they're going to be doing five years from now, three years from now, or certainly ten years from now. It might be that they have everything set forth in a plan, minute by minute, but I doubt it. I don't think they know.. And yet we have to estimate and probably they have to estimate as best they can. Now here is a question that comes up. It came up at the IAC meeting last Tuesday; it will come up again. I hope we shall get some kind of settlement, in the paper we are now drafting. Over the past six months, or perhaps longer - nine months or even a year - the Soviet Union has shown signs of change in tactics or change

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in policy or something. There hasn't been the old fight, the same disagreeable harshness that there used to be. They're not quite as unamiable as they were in the days of Stalin. Now you know the evidence for this if you've read the newspapers. I don't want to recite it here. But the problem is this - when you look over the history of our relations with Russia - the relations of the West with Russia - you are forced to think of the extremely harsh and disagreeable things they did, even back to 1946. If you also think of our problem of building up a defense and if you think of how often Uncle Joe used to rescue us just at the moment when we were having terrible difficulties getting something through Congress or getting our allies to agree to get together with us, you remember that they would do something so disagreeable that all our problems would be solved. Well, it looks as if that tendency was not operating now. Here's what I'm getting at - in our paper on the probable courses of action of the Soviet Union for the next two years we have to give some kind of estimate of what line we think they are probably going to follow. And you've got to make up your mind. Have they in fact changed their policy or have they in fact changed their tactics, or haven't they? Is this something that we are deluding ourselves about? Or is this something that was in the newspapers but isn't so? Or what? You must decide perhaps first the matter of fact. Has there or has there not been a change? And we must not allow ourselves to be misled by the newspapers. Well, suppose you decide there has been a change. Are you able to formulate just what the change is - what you think it is? Or if you do not think that they have changed their ultimate objectives - let's say that you do not think that they have decided to become friends and brothers and live with us peacefully from now on forevermore. Do you think it is something else? Let us say you decide there has been a change. Then what is the significance of it?

What does it mean? How long is it going to go on? Why are they doing it? Are they doing it by intention or is it accident? It is, I think, perhaps a matter of the very first importance - one of the most important matters that we can estimate.

These questions that have just been described to you - has there been a change? If there has been, what does it mean? How long will it last? Does it contain a danger for us? If so, what danger? How? Now that's a thing we've had argument and argument and argument about for the last month or so. And I shall be very glad if I happen to be the chairman of the meeting on this subject - I shall be very glad if we can get this thing settled and formulated and I can go up to the state of Maine and relax for a bit, confident that we now know exactly what the Soviet Union is going to do for the next two years because it has been written down in print on a piece of paper and agreed upon by all intelligence agencies. I give that as an illustration of a kind of question which you can't answer with any mathematics at all. Not at all. The answer depends upon your knowledge of history, knowledge of political science, your experience; it depends upon your prejudice; it depends upon your wisdom, and, collectively, it depends upon some kind of mingling of the collective prejudices and experiences and judgments and so on of all the people who gather together to make this wretched estimate. I can tell you that the conducting of a meeting where this mingling goes forward when you know that you have got to produce a text - you're not just there for present discussion, you have to produce a text most people will agree on - is a wearing process. That's perhaps the principal duty of our office, to work these things out. It is, I think, the extremely interesting one. I don't know of any more interesting job there could be than to attempt to answer these questions. I think, and I'm sure you will agree, that it is a highly responsible

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one; and we certainly hope that we're doing it as well as we can, and that we will improve on our performance as the years go on.

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